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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 002276

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/NGA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ'S SHIA HEARTLAND: PROMINENT SHIA SHARES
CONCERNS AND PROMISES SUGGESTIONS FOR WINNING HEARTS AND
STABILITY

REF: KUWAIT 01417

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reason 1.5 (d)

11. (S) Summary: One week after returning to Iraq, noted Shia leader Mohammed Bahr al-Uloum and his party are encountering an Iraqi populace disillusioned with the lack of security and disgruntled at the fact that Ba'ath Party members still hold positions of power, according to Kuwaiti Shia businessman Abdul Ilah Marafie, who is helping to sponsor Bahr al-Uloum and speaks with his party on a regular basis. Marafie relayed Bahr al-Uloum's concerns and told Poloff he would soon obtain concrete suggestions from Bahr al-Uloum as to how coalition forces might court Iraqi Shi'is and counter the destabilizing effects of possible Iranian and Saudi influences. End Summary.

12. (S) In a followup to reftel meeting, Poloff met with Kuwaiti businessman and Director of the Marafie Foundation, Abdul Ilah Marafie on May 25 to discuss developments in southern Iraq from a Shia perspective. Marafie said that noted exiled Iraqi cleric Sayed Mohammed Bahr al-Uloum had entered Iraq a week earlier with two of his sons and a number of family members. The group traveled first to Basra, then Samawa, before visiting Baghdad. Using Thuraya phones provided by Marafie, they have been communicating with him on an almost daily basis. Marafie said the party has encountered a populace in Iraq who are extremely disillusioned that coalition forces have not forcibly removed all Ba'athists and their sympathizers from power. Although they give civil administrator L. Paul Bremer high marks for his recent initiative to purge Ba'athists from power (this has "had a big effect"), they stress that this policy must be continued and enforced throughout all of Iraq. Calling the removal of Ba'athists a "major issue," Marafie emphasized that undertaking such action would be a visible sign for Iraqis that the Saddam era is over, and would clearly demonstrate the intent of coalition forces to establish and maintain law and order.

13. (S) Marafie also relayed Bahr al-Uloum's concerns about the general level of instability in Iraq, noting that it is fueling unhappiness and a large amount of conspiracy theories about the true intent of the coalition. Unable to understand what the composition of an Iraqi Interim Authority might look like, worried that it might not represent all Iraqis, and frustrated by a real or perceived lack of input, many Iraqis hypothesize that the U.S. struck a deal with Saddam Hussein.

14. (S) Marafie said that securing Najaf, in particular, will be vital to stabilizing the Shia population, and through the Shia, the whole of Iraq. He said Bahr al-Uloum had met with the "frontline" clerics of Najaf, Sayed Mohammed Ali al-Sistani and Sayed Mohammed Said Hakim and told them it was their duty to play a more political role in the conflict and "lead people to stability." But the clerics have thus far opted for a less prominent and more apolitical role, largely due to the fact there is "no feeling of law and order" in Iraq. Marafie said the coalition should act quickly to establish a local police force in Najaf.

15. (S) A lack of local leadership is also creating problems in Iraq. In Najaf, Marafie claimed, the appointed head of the local government is a Sunni, ex-Ba'athist from Basra. (Note: When asked, Marafie could not say who appointed him. End Note.) The coalition should focus on installing people "whose hearts burn for their country, not power."

16. (S) Asked about possible Iranian attempts to sabotage efforts to restore stability in Iraq, Marafie, said there is "definitely" Iranian influence at work there, and offered his assessment that Saudi Arabia might also be undermining stability. Marafie said that Iran is afraid that Qom will lose its influence as a Shia center of learning as Najaf regains its former glory, and the Saudis are concerned that moderate voices (who they "are against") may gain a foothold in Iraq. (Note: Marafie downplayed the suggestion that SCIRI leader Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim was being directly influenced by Iran, purposefully stating he was not/not the source of "Iranian pressure" being exerted in the two holy cities. End Note.)

17. (S) Marafie was unable to offer recommendations from Bahr al-Uloun as to what specific actions coalition forces might take to further stabilize Najaf at this time (i.e. how to go about establishing a police force, urging moderates to speak out, etc.) without inflaming the already tense political environment, but promised Poloff he would solicit them. Post will continue to meet with Marafie in an effort to monitor the situation in Najaf and other religiously significant Shi'a cities from Bahr al-Uloun's vantage point.

18. (S) Comment: While many of Bahr al-Uloun's reported concerns are being addressed by the recent actions of the Civil Administrator, it is clear that the Shi'a community is still very uneasy about the future. Special focus on the restoration of stability and services in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala may be one way to quickly make friends with Iraq's Shi'a majority.
JONES